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# Task Types and Discursive Features: Mediating Role of Meta-talk in Focus

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## ABSTRACT

Exploring opportunities by which learners can internalize new knowledge and consolidate existing knowledge has long been a point of interest in English as a foreign language research. This study investigated how meta-talk opportunities on discourse markers created by four task types including text reconstruction, dictogloss, translation and jigsaw can promote language learning at discourse level. To this end, 80 participants were assigned into four groups of twenty students. They were 10 pairs in each group. Having considered homogeneity issues in participants' selection, the researchers assigned one type of tasks to be performed in each group. Students' performances were audio recorded and transcribed for the purpose of analyzing the potentials of different tasks in engaging participants in language at the level of discourse through meta-talk opportunities. ANOVA results followed by post hoc pairwise comparisons indicated that translation and jigsaw tasks had the highest potentials and dictogloss and text reconstruction had the least potentials in creating meta-talk opportunities on discourse. The findings imply how design features of tasks set up differentiated language use. Also, the findings imply that teachers and material developers need to make principled decisions about which task has the highest potentials in maximizing learning opportunities.

**Keywords:** language engagement; discursive devices; translation task; dictogloss task; text reconstruction task; jigsaw task; meta-talk

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## Introduction

Language learning classroom research has shown increased interest in investigating how language learning is affected by information-processing approaches, sociolinguistic approaches and critical discourse analysis. Research on how information processing models prime language learning covers a variety of topics including how learning is determined by input and how different techniques of enhancing and enriching input can affect the quantity of learning (Bygate, 1999; Dastjerdi & Farshid, 2011; Hoang & Boers, 2016; Krashen, 1985; Long, 1983; Moradi & Farvardin, 2016). Research also investigated the positive role of interaction and negotiation of meaning in task performances in language learning and acquisition (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000; Foster, 1998; Foster & Ohta, 2005; Gass, Mackey, & Pica, 1998; Mohamadi, 2015). In addition, how language output and teacher feedback leads to learners' accomplishment is investigated from this perspective (Mislevy, Steinberg, & Almond, 2002; Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Oliver & Mackey, 2003).

It was in the 1990s that scholars turned to sociocultural theories to explore the nature of learning. Since 1990s, an increasing number of teacher-researchers have begun to examine the social practices that shape classroom life (Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006). Related notions to Socio-cultural Theories (SCT) have been explored including the Vygotskian concepts of mediated learning, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. Various studies on how scaffolding can develop language skills (Schwieter, 2010), how scaffolding and collaboration affect participation (Lange, Costley, & Han, 2016), how power relations affect scaffolding (Kayi-Aydar, 2013) and how language can be brought to ones' ZPD (Mirzaee, Domakani, & Roshani, 2010) were conducted.

Classroom discourse analysis is the third line of argument in research on language learning. Critical approach involves analyzing what happens in the classroom by putting the classroom in larger context of society and examining how social, economic, political and cultural forces affect the reality of a classroom (Van Dijk, 1993). From this perspective, studies investigated the importance of communicative competence, context, variation and the importance of collaborative work in negotiation of intention and interpretation (Cots Caimons, 1996). Research also investigated how the ideational and sociopolitical forces affect learning in general and language learning in particular (Ko, 2013; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Okazaki, 2005).

Numerous current studies have highlighted the positive role of interaction in second language learning supporting sociolinguistic theory which holds learning a language is determined by the social practices of participants as they co-construct L2 discourse through intersubjectivity (Mayo & Ibarrola, 2015; Schwieter, 2010). This co-management of the discourse helps learners to maintain their interest and attention on task performance and at the same time enjoy playfulness in the spontaneous use of language (Mirzaee et al., 2010). Learners can be taught to establish intersubjectivity in task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Estaji & Vafaeimehr, 2015). The sound theoretical and practical features of TBLT such as rich input, authentic tasks, collaboration and learning by doing are the requirements of acquisition (Doughty & Long, 2003). Task is defined as an activity in which a) "meaning is primary, b) there is a goal which needs to be worked toward, 3) the activity is outcome-evaluated; and 4) there is a real-world relationship" (Skehan, 1998a, p. 268).

Language literature is thrived with studies investigating how tasks affect language learning including task design (e.g. complexity), and task implementation (e.g. planning time, repetition). For example, how manipulation in task design and complexity affects attentional resources and in turn complexity, accuracy and fluency of language is addressed (Sadeghi & Mosalli, 2013). Robinson's (2001) study of cognitively demanding tasks for learners indicated that in complex

tasks, learners go through more negotiation and interaction adjustments and this causes them to notice how language functions. In his study, complexity is defined as code complexity (linguistic complexity), cognitive complexity (familiarity with the topic or cognitive computations) and communities stress (planning time). Considering studies on task implementation variables, Dao and McDonough (2017) found that in tasks where lower proficiency learners were given information holder role rather than receiver, learners were engaged more in language-related episodes. Likewise, Kim and Tracy-Ventura (2013) supported positive role of task repetition both in terms of content and procedure as implementation conditions in Korean EFL learners' fluency, accuracy and complexity of language performance.

Potential of task types in creating learning opportunities has inspired pedagogical innovation in teaching and research in recent years (Juan-Garau & Jacob, 2015). The most efficient tasks in triggering interaction are the ones in which learners require exchange of information, solve problems and reach decisions in order to complete tasks (Mayo & Ibarrola, 2015). "Popular information gap tasks are those where the learners have to spot differences in pictures or texts, reconstruct a story on the basis of visual input (jigsaw) and decision making tasks" (Mayo & Ibarrola, 2015, p.44). Also, Peters and Pauwels (2015) investigated the effect of recognition, cued output tasks and combination of both. The results indicated that although all task types increased gain scores in language, cued output tasks generated the best performance. Shegar, Zhang, and Low's (2013) study of the effect of consciousness raising task and recast on grammatical structures of the target language approved positive role of these types of tasks as they trigger noticing. Similarly, Llinares and Dalton-Puffer (2015) investigated the effect of different types of tasks (whole-class discussion, group work discussions, individual interviews and role plays) on using evaluative language (lexico-grammatical resources in evaluating things and people). The results indicated role play was the most and whole class discussion was the least potential task.

What is shared among these studies in this regard is that most of them focused on how syntax, pronunciation and vocabulary are attended to by the learners as a result of task manipulation and design (Ansarin & Mohamadi, 2013a, 2013b; Bao, 2015). However, little attention is given to other linguistic systems such as discourse and it is left as potentially interesting area for research. This paper investigates if different collaborative language learning tasks have different potentials in engaging students with language at the level of discourse. This research has been organized in the following way. First, it gives a brief overview of recent history on task-based instruction and discourse analysis and lays out the theoretical dimension of it. Then, it describes the design, synthesis, characterization and evaluation. All taken together, as well as the results shed light on how tasks can help improve the ecology and reality of language learning classes for learning of discourse.

## Literature Review

Discourse theory has received prominence in social sciences (Young & Harrison, 2004). Millward (2005) stated that discourse analysis is the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. Crystal (as cited in Millward, 2013) defined discourse as a unit of language larger than a sentence that has coherence. It operates beyond grammar level and focuses on context and social functions of a language.

According to Millward (2005), "grammatical and phonological elements, context, situation, purpose, pitch, intonation and gesture can play a decisive role in the process of comprehension" (p. 2). Given the importance of these factors in getting a message across, research can explore the efficacy of these elements in communicative interaction. The objective of discourse analysis is to clarify the interaction of these factors that lead to coherence (Hyland, 2017). Since discourse of any type is important for understanding, close attention should be given to all segments one of which is cohesion. Cohesion is achieved through interpretability which necessitates simultaneous processing of many linguistic elements including discourse markers (Foucart, Romero-Rivas, Gort, & Costa, 2016). "Discourse markers are words or phrases that function within the linguistic system to establish relationships between topics or grammatical units in discourse" (Hellermann & Vergun, 2007, p.158). Textual discourse markers are the ones used for organization of written and spoken discourse and interpersonal discourse markers are the ones indicating the writer or speaker's stance towards the content or the potential reader and listener (Dafouz-Milne, 2008). The examples of each are mentioned in Table 1 of this study.

Despite the importance of discourse, it is understudied since the studies on second language acquisition have mostly focused on acquisition of linguistic elements such as phonological, morphological and syntactic entities through explicit instruction by making them the locus of attention in language classes (Hellermann & Vergun, 2007). Recent interest in discourse at language classes has changed the trend of research from considering discourse and discursive markers and from purely linguistic elements to essentialities to be attended to in language classes where interaction is the requirement for acquisition to occur. Recently, research on discourse has included studies on the instructional methods, either explicit or implicit techniques, for treating discourse markers in EFL classes (Aidinlou & Mehr, 2012; Rahimi & Riasati, 2012). Several studies have addressed discourse markers in language learning classes. Chen (2014) investigated the potential effect of instruction on discourse markers and listening comprehension. Likewise, the study of the effect of two instructional methods of task-based instruction and traditional presentation, practice and production model on learning of discourse makers of Saudi learners indicated that both types of instruction had positive effects with task-based instruction having more effect (Alraddadi, 2016). The qualitative study of function and types of discourse markers that non-native Colombian teachers use in the classes indicated how textual and interpersonal discourse markers they use contributed to coherent flow of interaction (Castro & Marcela, 2009).

Although research indicated that explicit instruction yields more effective learning outcomes compared with implicit non-interventionist instruction on syntax, semantic and discourse, effect of implicit instruction is also confirmed in research (Takahashi, 2005). An increasing number of interlanguage researchers have become interested in exploring whether L2 discourse features can be acquired without any instructional intervention (Dastjerdi & Farshid, 2011; McCarthy, 1991; Rymes, 2015). Longitudinal study of an immigrant second language learner as naturalistic language learner indicated how frequency of occurrence of three types of discourse markers "you know", "like", "then" changed over one year interaction with the researcher (Polat, 2011). Likewise, the study of children and adults use of interactional discourse markers in narrative tasks indicated that they differently use discourse marker both in terms of the type and function which means discourse marker use mediated the development of discourse maker knowledge (Furman & Özyürek, 2007). The non-interventionist (incidental) learning can be best seen in meta-talk analysis where learners take one step ahead and manipulate language to serve their conversation management. Gutiérrez (2008) mentioned that "language development and consciousness including metalinguistic awareness are both social and cognitive constructs" (p. 523). Socio-cultural theorists emphasize the importance of social interaction in psychological development. Language development when seen as a part of psychological development makes socio-cultural theory relevant to the comprehensible output hypothesis (Ryan, 2013).

*Metatalk and discourse markers*

Swain (1995) stated three functions of comprehensible output. Comprehensible output can help learners with noticing, formulating hypothesis about language and reflecting about the language through meta-talk. Meta-talk is defined as verbalizing linguistic knowledge which shows consciousness (Gutiérrez, 2008). Meta-talk can be seen in the language related episodes (LREs) in conversations. In these episodes learners talk about the language and comment on metalinguistic knowledge (Del Pilar García Mayo, 2002). In language related episodes, learners question about the accuracy of form and meaning and correct themselves and also others implicitly or explicitly (Ismail & Samad, 2010). Just as socio-cultural theorists have shown that social interaction leads to psychological development, comprehensible output researchers led by Swain (1995) have produced evidence showing that comprehensible output leads to language development. According to Williams and Doughty (1998), meta-talk is encouraged in contexts where the learners are engaged in making meaning and realize the critical link between form and meaning.

Research developments suggest that collaborative tasks may be perhaps one of the best ways to get students to produce comprehensible output (Oliver & Mackey, 2003; Pica, 2005; Wang & Castro, 2010). In these types of task, while working together, students have access to their partners' knowledge so they can rise above their individual level of competence and become more professional experts with the help of their partners (Swain, 1995). By doing this, learners can learn new knowledge or consolidate the existing knowledge (Huang, Strawderman, & Murray, 2012).

Collaborative tasks are different in type. Text reconstruction is one type of communicative tasks in which students are provided with a grammatically incorrect or incomplete text which is contextualized in a paragraph or conversation and learners are asked to restore its grammaticality. Dictogloss task is called communicative as it encourages students to fill the missing parts after listening to the orally read text. Jigsaw is a communicative task as it encourages individual learners who have a specific piece of information to put the pieces together and make the whole. Translation task is potentially a communicative task if it is done collaboratively.

Communicative language learning tasks have been favored as tools that promote natural and communicative uses of the language. There are several studies on meta-talk analysis and task types. Ismail and Samad (2010) investigated the grammatical items focused in dictogloss and opinion gap task performances and their findings indicated that tenses, subject verb agreement and vocabulary are the most focused grammatical items in language related episodes. Barcroft (2009) investigated if teacher modeling of meta-talk in dictogloss tasks can help second language acquisition. The results advocated the role of teacher modeling on learner uptake. The role of task types on syntactic devices is also investigated by Ansarin and Mohamadi (2013a). The results showed significant difference in task effectiveness in engaging learners with meta-talk opportunities on syntax across four task types. The results also suggest that translation task is the most effective and jigsaw is the least effective one. Besides, text reconstruction and dictogloss were at intermediate ranks in terms of efficacy in engaging learners with language. In addition, research indicated that task types affected intonation learning favoring text reconstruction as the most effective task in promoting meta-talk on intonation (Ansarin & Mohamadi, 2013b).

Although there is a large bulk of materials supporting the role of meta-talk in the acquisition of morphosyntactic features, there is limited amount of support for the efficacy of these techniques in acquisition of discourse competence. Therefore, the following research question was set to find the answer:

1. Do translation, jigsaw, text reconstruction and dictogloss tasks have significantly different potentials in creating meta-talk opportunities on discursive devices?

## Methodology

### *Participants*

The participants in the present study were 80 (32 male and 48 female) non-native speakers (NNS) at the intermediate level of language proficiency whose L1 was Persian. Their age range was from 18 to 23 ( $m = 20$ ). They were randomly selected and invited for interview sessions. The participants were approximately at the same level of language proficiency as their oral ability was measured on a structured interview according to Foreign Service Institute (FSI) rating scale. FSI rating scale is an analytic scale. The FSI proficiency scale has a range of 11 possible scores: 0, 0+, 1, 1+, 2, 2+, 3, 3+, 4, 4+, and 5. In FSI, level 1 is indicative of elementary proficiency, level 2 is limited working proficiency, level 3 is minimum professional proficiency, level 4 is full professional proficiency, and level 5 is native or bilingual proficiency. Participants whose scores were one standard deviation above the mean and one standard deviation below the mean were selected as the target participants. They are associated with minimum professional proficiency level of FSI rating scale.

### *Instruments*

*Interview.* Two trained raters attended the interview session and rated participants' language proficiency according to Foreign Service Institute (FSI) rating scale. The inter-rater reliability was calculated and the results indicated a significant agreement between the raters ( $\alpha = .987$ ,  $p = .000$ ) on Cronbach's alpha level.

*Task selection and evaluation.* Prior to conducting the research, the researchers conducted a topic familiarity questionnaire (Appendix 1) to ensure participants' familiarity with the input of the tasks and to ensure consistency of content across tasks. Among ten items of this questionnaire, social disorders such as unemployment, crime, addiction and divorce were the topics selected by the participants as the most familiar topics. Translation, dictogloss, text reconstruction and jigsaw tasks were designed on the basis of the selected topics. The design of the sample tasks was evaluated by five teachers according to Nunan (1989)'s checklist of appropriateness (Appendix 2). The checklist included questions about clarity of the objectives of the tasks, task correspondence with learner proficiency level, their degree of being interesting and motivating and task potential in promoting negotiation of meaning. The inter-rater reliability between five raters on Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = .769$ ,  $p = .000$ ) indicated tasks were significantly appropriate for the research purpose.

Besides, the raters were asked to evaluate the complexity level of the sample task on the basis of a checklist (Appendix 3) by Geldenhuys (2011) to ensure the same complexity index across tasks, so that any difference in performance would be attributed to the differences in the degree of potentiality of different task types in engaging students with language at the level of discourse. The checklist included information on the level of abstraction in the tasks (here/now or there and then), the text (vocabulary, syntax, text length and structure), and linguistic context (level of redundancy, information density and complexity of sentence). The inter-rater reliability among five raters on Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ,  $p = .000$ ) indicated appropriateness of tasks for the research purpose. Everything being equal in terms of topics, content, complexity and implementation, the differences in the task performance could be attributed to the design features.

*Telegram application.* To qualitatively analyze the learner task performance from student perspective, the researchers asked the participants to join a *Telegram* group via a link to share and express their attitudes on task performance experience. Learners voluntarily joined the group. They were asked to have pseudonyms if they wished and they were assured about the confidentiality of their responses and the use of their responses only for curriculum improvement purposes.

#### *Procedure*

Having selected the participants and prepared research instruments, the researchers assigned the participants into four groups. Since their linguistic background and language proficiency were the same, as confirmed by FSI rating scale in the interview session, they were assigned into different groups as they wished. Each group was given a different task (dictogloss, text construction, translation task and jigsaw) to perform. Participants in each group were instructed to perform one type of task. Instructions were given in their L1 to avoid any misunderstanding in the task procedure. Similarly, students were allowed to use their L1 during task performance because of their limited ability to carry out meta-talk in L2. No time restriction was imposed as long as the task was completed in a fifty-minute class period.

To make their meaning as clear, coherent and precise as possible, learners would debate language form (morphosyntax, discourse, and lexical choice). The performances of the four groups were audio recorded for further analysis of discursive devices that participants used in their interaction.

To give room for learner voices in this analysis, participants were asked to express their attitudes about the task performance experiences in a group on *Telegram*. Theme elicitation and log analysis of Telegram discussion through open coding procedure were conducted. Three major themes were elicited from the log analysis on *Telegram*. The themes are discussed in the analysis section.

#### *Design and data analysis*

Occurrence of each LREs was treated as a test score. An ANOVA test was used to answer the research question. It compared the mean number of LREs where meta-talk on discursive markers occurred in different task types. Besides, *Telegram* log analysis was conducted by open coding of the major themes elicited from the analysis by the researcher. Elicited themes are discussed in the analysis section. Table 1 displays the framework adopted from Pérez and Macià (2002) was used to identify LREs in which participants were engaged in meta-discourse as they performed the tasks.

Table 1  
*Discursive Devices and the Functions They Play*

Category	Functions	Examples
<b>Textual</b>		
Logical connectives	Express semantic relationship between main clause and sentences	And, therefore, however, still
Frame makers	Mark main transitions between different stages (e.g. sequence material, indicate topic shift)	First, second; now, let's turn to..., before delving into...,
Illocutionary markers	Naming the act of the speaker performs or announcing the speaker's intention	I'd like to discuss: I shall highlight: I have attempted to compare
reminders	Refer back to other sections of the talk	As I mentioned before, as I think back over what I have said thus far.... Throughout the lecture
Attributors	Provide support for the speaker's arguments	Because of the increasing evidence
Code glosses	Clarify, explain, rephrase or exemplify propositional meaning	For example, that is, such as, in other words
<b>Interpersonal</b>		
Hedges	Withhold full commitment to the statement	Normally, perhaps, for the most part. May, might, I think
Certainly	Express full commitment to the statement	Of course, plain, simply, there is no such thing as
Emphatics	To highlight aspects of propositional content or mark salience	Do in fact., most importantly:
Attitude	To express the speakers' attitude towards propositional content	It is my opinion that, the most interesting topic ...
Relational markers	To establish and maintain rapport with the partner	You might be wondering what.... Can we learn from....?
Personal markers	To explicitly refer to the speaker	I

*Note: this framework for analyzing the attended discourse markers in learner performance is adapted from the study by Pérez and Macià (2002)*

Table 2 indicates episodes obtained from the present study to show how this framework was used to find the discourse devices that the participants attended to as they were trying to perform their task and manage their conversation.

## Results

### *Meta-talk on discourse marker across four task types*

To compare the number of LREs in which learners were engaged in meta-talk on discursive markers, the researchers used ANOVA. The results are indicated in Table 3 and Table 4. Table 3 provides descriptive statistics on the occurrence of discursive devices in translation task ( $M=3.70$ ,  $N=20$ ), dictogloss ( $M=1.70$ ,  $N=20$ ), jigsaw task ( $M=2.75$ ,  $N=20$ ) and text reconstruction ( $M=2.45$ ,  $N=20$ ).



Table 2  
*Discursive markers and sample episodes*

Attitude maker	S1: crime and violation also S2: it is better to write "also" at the beginning of sentence S1: I think both of them are right
Frame maker	S1: the next subject is unemployment S2: no the next as important as ... we should show the level S2: ok the next subject which is as important as previous subject S3: yes
Hedges	S1: to eliminate their needs but I am not sure S2: eliminate their needs? S1: or what? Solve their needs? S2: no "satisfy" S1: yes or meet
Code glosses	S1: we can say high rank jobs S2: yes discriminating can be observed in high rank jobs S1: such as engineers
Personal marker (referring explicitly to the speaker)	S1: I say this sentence is one of the most important problems S2: yes it is important problem; it is the cause of other problems
Relational marker (establishing rapport with the partner)	S1: what do you think about this? Do we need "and" here? S2: yes "and; is correct
Reminder (referring to other sections)	S1: Addiction is written at the beginning of the sentence S2: ok? S1: yes S2: ok addiction was the cause or effect? S1: let me see which was the cause and effect

Table 3  
*Descriptive Statistics on Discursive Devices across Task Types*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95%Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Translation task	20	3.7000	1.38031	30865	3.0540	4.3460	2.00	6.00
Dictogloss	20	1.7000	80131	17918	1.3250	2.0750	00	3.00
Jigsaw	20	2.7500	2.24488	50197	1.6994	3.8006	00	9.00
Text reconstruction	20	2.4500	1.87715	41974	1.5715	3.3285	00	8.00
Total	80	2.6500	1.78673	19976	2.2524	3.0476	00	9.00

As it is indicated, there is a difference in occurrence of discourse markers across four task types. But to investigate if the difference is significant, one way ANOVA was conducted. The results are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4

*One-way ANOVA on Discursive Devices across Task Types*

Discourse devices	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	41.100	3	13.700	4.932	.003
Within Groups	211.100	76	2.778		
Total	252.200	79			

By looking at the p- value in Table 4, the researchers found that there is a statistically significant difference across the four groups performing different tasks in terms of language engagement at the level of discourse since the p -value (0.003) is less than the research confidence level (0.05). Therefore, it is concluded that translation, dictogloss, text reconstruction and jigsaw tasks have significantly different potentials in engaging learners with discursive devices. To find out where these differences lie, the researchers conducted Tukey post hoc comparison. The result of post hoc comparison is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Post hoc Comparison of Discursive Devices across Task Types*

Discourse devices Tukey HSD						
(I) task types	(J) task types	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
Translation task	Dictogloss	2.00000*	.52703	.002	.6156	3.3844
	Jigsaw	.95000	.52703	.280	-.4344	2.3344
	Text reconstruction	1.25000	.52703	.091	-.1344	2.6344
Dictogloss	Translation task	-2.00000*	.52703	.002	-3.3844	-.6156
	Jigsaw	-1.05000	.52703	.200	-2.4344	.3344
	Text reconstruction	-.75000	.52703	.489	-2.1344	.6344
Jigsaw	Translation task	-.95000	.52703	.280	-2.3344	.4344
	Dictogloss	1.05000	.52703	.200	-.3344	2.4344
	Text reconstruction	.30000	.52703	.941	-1.0844	1.6844
Text reconstruction	Translation task	-1.25000	.52703	.091	-2.6344	.1344
	Dictogloss	.75000	.52703	.489	-.6344	2.1344
	Jigsaw	-.30000	.52703	.941	-1.6844	1.0844

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

By reviewing the Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons (Table 5), the researchers found that all the mean differences in the occurrence of discourse markers across four task types were insignificant except for translation and dictogloss tasks since the p -value (0.002) for the mean difference between translation and dictogloss is less than the research confidence level (0.05), whereas the p -values for the mean difference between other task types ( translation and jigsaw,  $p = 0.28 > .05$ ; translation and text reconstruction,  $p = 0.91 > .05$ ; dictogloss and jigsaw,  $p = 0.20 > .05$ ; dictogloss and

text reconstruction,  $p, 0.48 > 0.05$ ; jigsaw and text reconstruction,  $p, 0.94 > 0.05$ ) are greater than the research confidence level (0.05).

To see which task led to more use of discursive devices, the researchers consulted Table 3 again. Translation task with the mean of 3.70 led to more use of discursive devices than dictogloss with the mean of 1.70. Although the mean difference between other task types was not significant, a glance at Table 3 shows that after translation task, jigsaw task best led to more use of discursive devices ( $M=2.75$ ). Text reconstruction task ( $M=2.45$ ) is at the next rank and the final rank is for dictogloss ( $M=1.70$ ). Since the mean differences between the tasks were not significant except for translation task and dictogloss, the researchers should be very conservative in their interpretation.

Although ANOVA showed a significant difference in the potentials of different tasks types in engaging students with discourse markers as a way to solve their conversation problems, it doesn't tell much about the magnitude of the difference. To investigate this magnitude, researchers conducted eta square analysis by dividing the sum of squares for between- groups (41.100) by the total sum of squares (252.200). The resulting eta square value is 0.16, which is in Cohen's terms (as cited in Pallant, 2001) a small effect size. The small effect size means researchers should be conservative in their interpretations of the results.

#### *Log analysis from student perspective*

Three major themes were elicited from learner perspective and discussion on task performance. The first theme was the group membership. Students' pair work on task performance was attended to by students as one important point which needs revisiting. They were not satisfied with pair work either because one member takes all the responsibility and monitors the group with having a sense of leadership which disrespects the other member or one member's dissatisfaction with the other member's not doing his portion of responsibility appropriately well. This might be attributed to the learning conventions practiced in Iran which is discussed later. The second theme was teacher presence. Students suggested teachers to have more central role in pair work. Although teachers gave instruction on task procedure and actively attended the classes and provided support when needed, students required more involvement on the side of the teacher such as having teacher as a member in their task performance. The third theme was students inclined to have information about their progress. The feeling of confusion and not knowing if their conversation is going in the right direction at the beginning of task performance was one of the important themes they referred to. They were inclined to know how well they achieved what they were supposed to achieve. Therefore, they required assessment and evaluation by the teacher on task performances.

The themes can be attributed to the teaching conventions practiced in Iran. Iranian students for many years have been exposed to text-based and teacher-directed interventionist instruction (Sadeghi & Dousti, 2014). The structure and principles of collaborative/cooperative learning are new to both students and teachers. In Iranian education ecology, a central role is given to teachers. Teacher is the person who knows everything and has the right to say what is correct and what is not. In addition, students have reactive role rather than an active one. Having joined a pair does not legitimize the learning process. In addition, they rarely practiced group work, group harmony and group unity. Besides, education in Iran at local and national scale is product-based rather than a process-based one. This might be the reason why learners required someone, more likely the teacher, to evaluate and assess learning achievement and direct them in utilizing the learning opportunity the teacher created.

## Discussion

The facilitative role of meta-discourse has obviously been acknowledged, yet little has been said regarding the role of different tasks in creation of different meta-discourse opportunities. The expectation is that different tasks create different medium for learners. This study was an exploratory one focusing on the evaluation of the potentials of four task types in creating a medium for language engagement at discourse level. By looking at the *p*-values, the researchers found that the null hypothesis which claims there is no statistically significant difference in potentials of different task types in engaging participants with the language at the level of discourse was rejected and the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in language related engagement at the level of discourse across four task types was confirmed. By reviewing the Tukey HSD post hoc comparison, the researchers found that all the mean comparisons between the task types were insignificant except for translation and dictogloss tasks since the *p* value (0.002) for the mean difference between translation and dictogloss was less than the research confidence level (0.05), whereas the *p*-values for the mean difference between other task types were greater than the research confidence level (0.05).

One possible reason for the low occurrence of discourse markers in dictogloss task is that in dictogloss participants receive the input which is propositionally meaningful. They only need their memory and background knowledge to put the input down on paper, whereas in translation task participants have the Persian version so they need to come on a safe ground to start with by evaluating the prepositional and ideational meaning of the Persian version and then to work collaboratively to construct the same prepositional and ideational meaning of the text. To this end, their interlanguage potentials have been challenged. Translation activities also offer golden opportunities for language learning as far as discourse is concerned. The act of translation requires language learners to pay attention to language at higher than sentence level. When their comprehension is blocked, their inquiry may extend to meta-linguistic options to consolidate existing knowledge. Thus, the act of translating demands the learners to not only use their SL/FL linguistic system such as new lexicon and grammatical structure but also learn non-linguistic conceptual knowledge (e.g., coherence) and more rhetorical structures, and also reach more subject matter and background knowledge (contextual knowledge).

The findings supported mediation through talk-in-interaction and discourse scaffolding. These findings thus are against strong version of the input hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) which states that comprehensible input is the only necessary condition for language learning to take place.

This also pinpoints the inadequacy of the teacher-directed formal instructional setting in which language is treated as an object of the study. In task-based performance, language is treated as a means of communication and the participants function primarily as language users. The findings suggest that turn taking and self-regulation exercised by learners in their performances made them attend to whatever they have at their disposal including discourse elements. In line with the features approved to be attributed to task-based instruction in comparison with text-based instruction, the environment created by task-based instruction provides flexible multimodality, real-time collaboration, experiential and meaningful learning which can foster negotiation of meaning and learner autonomy (Chen, 2016). Different tasks provided a learning-centered discourse which enables learners to say what they wanted to say through establishing intersubjectivity. This intersubjectivity is achieved through a set of scaffolding mechanisms that encouraged appropriate use of L2 discourse in negotiated interaction.

The most frequently occurring meta-discourse was establishing the relation and connections between the contents using logical connectives, frame makers, attributers and code glosses at textual level and hedges, certainty, attitude, relational markers and personal markers at

interpersonal level. As with the results of this research, different tasks can create a totally different context for the acquisition of different language elements. The learners' ability to notice what kind of input he or she is being confronted with can be affected by the potentiality of each task in engaging students in the task itself and in turn the language items elicited within. The findings of the study corroborate the ones obtained in other studies. In their study of the impact of task types on learning, Shoarnaghavi, Seifoori, and Ghafoori (2014) found that divergent tasks increase accuracy and complexity of oral performance of Iranian EFL learners. In line with Zhang (2017), different types of task set up different language processing medium. In his study, it was found that receptive, productive, integrated interactive tasks led to more L2 collocation learning in comparison with either one.

Focused tasks do not prescribe the use of specific structure and the outcome is not predicted on the use of specific forms, but they provide opportunities to elicit the forms teachers intend to. This justification caused much of the attention of teachers to be devoted towards the focused tasks and this questions the potentiality of unfocused tasks in engaging students with the language since in these types of tasks students can avoid the use of language items that they are not confident about. This idea is supported by the study of Gholami, Karimi, and Atai (2017) who found that in unfocused collaborative interactions in tasks, Iranian EFL learners attended not only vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation but also idioms and collocations as well as lexical bundles. In this research, it is observed how unfocused tasks engage students in language items. In order to communicate what they mean in these unfocused tasks, participants used the repertoire of discursive devices to understand others and make themselves understood. Therefore, the unfocused tasks can be as effective as focused tasks in creating a medium for the ZPD. Students orient themselves to the tasks with different motives but as they engage in task performance they try to make a common ground to start with. As they find this safe place to start with, their interlanguage resources are challenged. This causes the intermediate interlanguage to be developed, so that these developments lead to the full target language.

### *Limitation*

Students failed to attend the language temporally because students were engaged with the task and their deep involvement with the topic and task accomplishments caused them not to attend to language. Besides, differentiating the potentials of each task type in creating a medium for language engagement on the part of participants masks the other potential of each task type which is task potentials in engaging students with the task itself.

### *Implications*

Materials and curriculum developers need to take principled decisions about what kinds of tasks to include in the course. There is evidence that the different types of task set up different patterns of language use (Bygate, 1999). These can be explored and exploited creatively by teachers and materials designers in order to use task as a way of leading learners to produce differentiated types of language. This helps learners rehearse their interlanguage. In addition, task-based language is introduced as a solution upon the rejection of discrete tests that aim at assessing the mastery of language components (Mislevy et al., 2002). It has been acknowledged that linguistic competence is not sufficient for communication. In addition to linguistic competence, learners need to have sociolinguistic competence (consideration of social context of language use), strategic competence (pragmatic considerations in using language to achieve goals), and discourse competence (familiarity with forms, customs, and standards of communication above the level of sentences)

(Mislevy et al., 2002). Therefore, assessment tasks should be designed in such a way that they integrate all these competences. In this way, one can make inferences about the students' competences which means testing practitioners need to go in line with teaching practitioners (Sadeghi & Khonbi, 2016).

## Conclusion

Research on task design attempts to find variables in task design that will lead to required second language acquisition processes such as negotiation or noticing. Tasks, and more specifically their components, characteristics, types, and implementation conditions have been the focus of recent research. This study aimed at investigating the potentials of four task types in maximizing learning opportunities for discursive markers for Iranian EFL learners. The potential of text reconstruction, dictogloss, jigsaw and translation task was measured by frequency counts of language related episodes in which learners attend to discursive devices to manage their conversation and solve communication problems. As the results indicated, translation and text reconstruction were found to be the most potential tasks in this regard. As with the results of this analysis, the great advantage of tasks is that they allow for learner engagement in realizing the communicative potentials of the encoded semantic resource as learners are challenged with language problems in completing the task (Ellis, 2003).

However, frequency count of linguistic targets masks another equally important issue which is the potential of tasks in engaging learners with higher social and cognitive processing such as task engagement, joint construction of knowledge and negotiations of meaning. This socio constructivist approach deals with how learners' engagement with the language as they collaborate with others helps them move from intersubjectivity (learners' pooling knowledge together through communicative act) to intrasubjectivity (learners' self-regulated learning). Therefore, more research from emic perspective is required to investigate the ethnography of conversation and its potential for self-development and intra-subjectivity. This may include investigations of task performances not only from linguistic perspectives but also from behavioral and functional perspectives (Mohamadi, 2017). At behavioral level, ethnography of task engagement shows how learners' behaviors are changed as a result of being engaged with the task. For example, constant keeping track of time and posture changing as signs of non-engagement decrease as a result of more task engagement. At functional level, learners' recourse to teacher is replaced by two more strategic problem solving techniques namely coinage or explanation. Analyzing how learners engage in task can provide insights into how learners establish intra-subjectivity (doing tasks without assistance) through inter-subjectivity (doing tasks with assistance)

As the log analysis of student perspective on task performance through discussion on *Telegram* application indicated, learners' concerns about group membership and leadership and central role assigned into instructors by learners might have impeded the maximum potentials task have in maximizing learning opportunities. Therefore, inclusion of sociolinguistic parameters such as group formation, teacher/ learner interaction and peer assistance in future research direction on task based learning and teaching might be worthy as they provide insights on other mediating factors that affect potentials of tasks.

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**Appendix 1****Topic Familiarity Questionnaire**

Which activities are you confident at?

Choose from the highest confidence to the lowest

1= highest

3=lowest

	1	2	3
1. positive thinking and negative thinking			
2. child labor			
3. Iran's educational system and its problems			
4. living alone			
5. social problems			
6. Describing people			
7. Telling stories			
8. movies			
9. travel			
10. men and woman differences			

**Appendix 2****Task Evaluation Questionnaire**

1. To what extent is the goal or goals of the task obvious a) to you b) to your students?
2. Is the task appropriate to the learners' proficiency level?
3. To what extent does the task reflect a real-world or pedagogic rational? Is this appropriate?
4. Is the task likely to be interesting and motivating to the students?
5. Is there an information gap or problem which might promote a negotiation of meaning?
6. Are the activities designed in a way which will allow learners to communicate and cooperate with others?
7. To what extent are learners encouraged to negotiate meaning?
8. Is the task at the appropriate level of difficulty for students?
9. If not, is there any way in which the task might be modified in order to make it either easier or more challenging?
10. Is the task realistic in terms of the resources and teacher-expertise it demands?

**Appendix 3****Evaluating Task Complexity**

fairly simple (1)    simple (2)    fairly complex (3)    complex (4)    very complex (5)



The world		
The level of abstraction	Here/now –there/then	
The linguistic context	Level of redundancy (low/high)	
	Information density (low/high)	
	Complexity of sentences (simple/complex )	
	Topic familiarity	
The communicative and cognitive processing demand		
The level of processing	Descriptive/ restructuring	The main thoughts and ideas are easy to follow. The giving of personal preferences and accounts make the level of processing move towards the restructuring level. Whether there is a need to compare or reorganize the information presented
The text		
a. Vocabulary	Simple/complex. Frequent/less frequent	
b. The syntax	Fairly simple clauses	
c. Text length and structure	Structured well or not	

Note: Adaptation with some minor modifications from Geldenbuys (2011).

**Appendix 4****Task types****1. Dictogloss****1.1 Instructions**

Try to reconstruct the text you are going to listen to with the help of your partner. You must reproduce the original text as faithfully as possible and in a grammatically accurate form. The text will be read twice at normal speed. The first time you listen to the text try to understand the meaning and do not write anything down. The second time you may take notes, writing down either key words or expressions that will help to reconstruct the text. Working together you will have to write a final version that is as correct as possible grammatically speaking. Revise carefully what you have written attempting to correct anything that doesn't look right.

**1.2. Input**

There are many countries in the world which are experiencing a variety of problems. Poverty, for example is bad conditions in which people are unable to have their basic needs. Poor people do not have the necessary resources and capacity to have basic needs like food, shelter, health and education. They live under difficult conditions which do not help them to develop their human potential. The other social issue is unemployment. Unemployment and poverty can be harmful for social relations. They can destroy harmony and unity of the family and they can create a feeling of dependence on others. Such effects stop the development of responsibility and self-dependence. Similarly important issue is gender discrimination. Women and men are equally important for the growth and development of individual and social lives. Unfortunately men are thought to have major roles in the society. This discrimination can be seen in work places by giving highly prestigious jobs and higher salary to men. The other important issue is divorce. Much of society has accepted divorce as the solution for a bad marriage. Children of divorce experience psychological harm, health problems, depression and loss of motivation for future life. Crime is one of major social problems presently. Criminal acts of violence may arise within families, within friends or within the whole society. Crime has an impact on the quality of life of the people in society including human injury, destruction, and dehumanization. Banishing criminals to prisons have also become the ground for future violence. Addiction is also one of the important social issues. It can be the cause or the effect of the problems we talked about. This not only affects

the people whom it directly touches but its effect spread along the society in the form of various diseases like HIV or criminal acts.

## 2. Text reconstruction

### 2.1 Instructions

Try to reconstruct the text with the help of your partner. You will have to add the words that are missing so that the text is meaningful. Linkers (i.e. prepositions, conjunctions ... etc) have been omitted. Verb endings and articles have also been eliminated. Some words are written in an incorrect form. Discuss with your partner the most accurate way of completing the text and provide the missing words and correct form of the incorrectly written words. You can also make changes if you consider them necessary. You may wish to add some words to connect the different sentences to improve cohesion. Write a grammatically correct final version of the text.

### 2.2. Input

There are many country in the world ..... are experiencing a various of problems. Poverty, for example is bad conditions in..... people is unable to look after their basic needs. Poor people does not have the necessity resources and capacity to have basic needs like food, shelter, healthy and education. They live under difficulty conditions ..... do not help them to develop their human potential. .... Social issue is unemployment. Unemployment ..... poverty can be harmful for social relations and they can destroy harmony and unity of the family and they can create a feeling of dependence on others. Such effects stopped the development of responsible and self-dependence. Similarly important issue is gender discrimination. Women and men are equal important for .... growth and development of individual and social lives. Unfortunately, men are thought to have major roles in the society. This discrimination seen in work places by giving high prestigious jobs and higher salary to men. ....important issue is divorce. Much of society has accept divorce as the solution for a bad marriage. Children of divorce ..... psychological harm, health problems, depression and loss of motivation for future life. Crime..... one of major social problems presently. Criminal acts of violence may arise within families, within friends or within the whole society. Crime have an ..... on the quality of life of the people in society including human injury, destruction, and dehumanization. Banishing criminals to prisons have also become the ground for future violence. Addiction is ..... one of the importance social issues. It can be the cause or the effect of the problems we talked about. This does not only affect the people ..... it directly touches but its effect spread along the society in the form of variety..... diseases like HIV or criminal acts.

## 3. Translation

### 3.1 Instruction

Read the following passage and try to provide the English equivalent with the help of your partner. Write a grammatically correct English version of the text.

### 3.2. Input

در جهان بسیاری از کشورها مشکلات زیادی را تجربه می کنند. به عنوان مثال، فقر شامل شرایط بدی است که انسانها از نیازهای اولیه خود برخوردار نیستند. مردم فقیر منابع و توانایی لازم برای رفع نیازهای خود از قبیل غذا، سرپناه، و آموزش را ندارند. آنها در شرایطی سخت که باعث می شود قوای انسانی آنها توسعه پیدا نکند زندگی می کنند. دومین مشکل جامعه، بیکاری است. بیکاری و فقر روابط اجتماعی را تخریب کرده و باعث از بین رفتن یکپارچگی خانواده و باعث احساس وابستگی به دیگران می شود و از ایجاد احساس مسئولیت جلوگیری می کند. موضوع بعدی که از اهمیت مشابهی برخوردار است، تبعیض جنسی می باشد. مردان و زنان هر دو به یک اندازه برای رشد و توسعه زندگی فردی و اجتماعی موثر می باشد. متأسفانه، اینطور تصور می شود که مردان نقش مهمتری دارند. این تبعیض جنسی در محل کار با دادن شغلهای رده بالا و حقوق بالا به آقایان قابل مشاهده است. مشکل بعدی طلاق می باشد. بیشتر افراد جامعه طلاق را به عنوان راه حل یک ازدواج ناموفق می دانند. بچه های طلاق از مشکلات روانشناختی و جسمی، افسردگی و عدم انگیزه برای زندگی آینده خود، رنج می برند. جرم، از دیگر مشکلات جامعه می باشد. خشونت و جرم ممکن است در خانواده، در دوستی ها و یا در کل جامعه ایجاد شود. جرم در کیفیت زندگی مردم تاثیر دارد و این شامل آسیبهای انسانی - تخریب و ناهنجاری جامعه می باشد. زندانی کردن مجرمین در زندانها باعث ایجاد خوشوختهایی بعدی می شود. اعتیاد یکی دیگر از مهمترین مشکلات جامعه میباشد. اعتیاد می تواند علت یا معلول مشکلات گفته شده باشد. اعتیاد نه تنها کسانی که مستقیماً با آن در تماس هستند را تحت تاثیر قرار می دهد بلکه کل جامعه را با بیماریهایی از قبیل ایدز و یا ناهنجاری اجتماعی تحت تاثیر قرار می دهد.

#### 4. Jigsaw

##### 4.1 Instruction

Try to convey to your partner in English the meaning of the pictures you are holding. Study them carefully so that you know exactly what they mean. One of you will have pictures 1, 3 and 5; and the other, pictures 2, 4 and 6. You cannot look at each other's pictures. Beginning with picture number 1 you will have to convey the information contained in your respective pictures (in order). Once the information is complete, you should write the information in a coherent and grammatically correct paragraph. Please, revise your text carefully.

##### 4.1. Visual stimulus

Series 1	
	
Series 2	
	
Series 3	
	

Series 4	
	
Series 5	
	
Series 6	
	